

attempted to refute them, until the able writer in our last number finally came boldly forward and demonstrated that the so-called Friedreich's form of locomotor ataxia was not locomotor ataxia at all. There is probably no more curious example in medical literature of writer after writer in systematic treatises of diseases of the nervous system, following blindly in the tracks of his predecessors, and employing a nomenclature which, if subjected to but a little thought, would have crumbled to the ground. So much for the influence of a mighty name.

But Friedreich's fame does not rest on a single foundation-stone. He builded well, and broadly, and surely. His work has become an enduring, component part of medical literature. His name is cherished by a broad brotherhood of friends, and respected by his co-workers the world over.

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THERE is growing in the community a sentiment which is but a reflex of the opinion long held by those best informed upon the subject among the medical profession, that commitments of patients to the insane asylums are too easily obtained, and their retention in these institutions too easily managed. The daily press of late has recorded numerous examples of inmates who have been withdrawn from our asylums only by the aid of tedious legal processes. What fatal instinct induces superintendents to retain their hold upon the unfortunate whose reason has returned, we know not. We only know, from the instances now recorded during the last six months, that some patients have been kept in durance long after their recovery. Can it be that the typical superintendent is color-blind to sanity; or is it that he possesses an inherited feeling of domination over his patients similar to that displayed by the cat to a maimed mouse? We do not believe this. The distrust abroad in the community, fortunately, may be specialized so as to refer to but few of our lunatic asylum superintendents, who, in general, we are far from believing to be actuated by any of the motives thus publicly expressed.

The whole business of the commitment of lunatics and their

retention needs reforming. If there are incompetent superintendents, there are likewise in the ratio of many to one incompetent physicians who sign the certificates that place the insane in the hands of the superintendents. There are likewise rotten boards of trustees and rottener municipal rings. With such sustenance at their roots, what can be expected of the outgrowth?

We say again that our remarks are far from applying to all asylums; on the contrary, they apply to but a few. But the public finds it difficult to separate the chaff from the wheat. Taken as a whole, the recent revelations of wrongly incarcerated and wrongly retained patients reflect upon the entire asylum system. Let the superintendents themselves, then, be the first to propose means to right the evil. From them should come the proposals for reform, or otherwise their sins of omission may place them on the same plane with their fellows who sin by commission.

As a last tribunal there remains public opinion—our potent American reformer. It is this agent of reform that has now aroused itself, and we await the result, regretting, however, that the governing powers of the asylums should not themselves have been the first to inaugurate the changes that an urgent public would now seem to render unoptional.

Emphatic action has been lately taken by the grand jury of the City and County of New York concerning the Ward's Island Lunatic Asylum. After thorough investigation they have made to the court the following presentment, whose recommendations in regard to the precautions that should accompany a commitment, and in regard to the privileges to be accorded to patients, appear to us to be eminently humane and proper. So far as this indictment relates to the Ward's Island Asylum we refrain from special comment, since, on the whole, the grand jury's charges are in themselves of a general nature:

NEW YORK, *Nov.* 1, 1882.

Hon. FREDERICK SMYTH, *Recorder*:

SIR: At the request of this grand jury upon matters relating to the management of Ward's Island Lunatic Asylum, there has developed strong evidence of the existence of a system so dangerous to the rights of citizens that we feel

it our duty to recommend that a change in the laws may be made to remedy the evil and prevent, as far as possible, the incarceration of sane persons in either public or private asylums. To this end we recommend that the alleged lunatic, in all cases, before commitment shall be examined by three physicians, each acting separately without the presence of the other, and that the examination shall be had before a judge and in the presence of counsel for the accused; that the physicians shall be selected by the judge in the same manner that jurors are drawn, from the names of all reputable physicians who may have been in active practice in the State, county, or city during a period of five years at least, and that a majority verdict, with the concurrence of the judge, shall be necessary to a commitment.

We find the sanitary arrangements very deficient, especially in the use of the baths, where healthy and diseased persons are compelled to use the same bath without change of water. From the testimony before us we find that opportunities afforded to patients to communicate with their friends are too limited, if not altogether forbidden, and we urgently recommend that such changes be adopted as will enable patients to confer with friends and legal counsel.

CALEB B. KNEVALS, *Foreman*.

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FROM the Secretary of the National Association for the Protection of the Insane and the Prevention of Insanity, we learn that at a recent meeting of Councillors of the Association held October 6, 1882, it was resolved: "That a semi-annual bulletin, or journal, should be issued by the Association, under the editorship of Dr. C. L. Dana (of the editorial staff of the *N. Y. Medical Record*), with an editing committee composed of Dr. Joseph Parish, of New Jersey; Dr. W. W. Godding, Superintendent of the Government Insane Hospital, Washington, D. C.; Miss A. A. Chevaillier, Boston, Mass.; Dr. H. M. Bannister, Assistant-Physician Kankakee Insane Hospital, Illinois; Dr. J. C. Shaw, Superintendent Kings Co. Insane Hospital, N. Y."; and, further, that it is proposed that this journal shall publish such medical and other papers as are read before the public meetings of the Association, and shall contain information regarding the progress of lunacy reform in this country and in Europe; also, such other matter as will tend to awaken an intelligent and practical interest in the important problems with which this Association has to deal. It is further proposed to appoint annually corresponding members from each State and from different parts of Europe, who shall be required to report, on or before the first day of January, to the Secretary of the